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FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6839
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHCHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2397
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RUEASWA/DTRA ALEX WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAADN/DTRA DULLES WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000211

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, ISN, PM/WRA
DOD FOR OSD/A/WINTERNITZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2018
TAGS: [MASS](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: ALBANIA'S DECAYING MUNITIONS - SO MUCH TO DO, SO
LITTLE TIME

REF: A) TIRANA 200 B) 07 TIRANA 446 C) 07 TIRANA 1064
D) TIRANA 202 E) TIRANA 199

Classified By: Amb. J.L. Withers II, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The March 15 fireball over Gerdec shown on international news programs reminded the world of Albania's enormous overhang of dangerous, decaying weapons. Over 100,000 tons of munitions, from small caliber to 160 mm artillery shells, are disintegrating in 44 poorly maintained and guarded depots throughout Albania, some near population centers. Since most of the munitions are more than 40 years old, they have become increasingly unstable and sensitive to heat and shock. A recent analysis has shown that Albania could destroy its entire stockpile by 2012 at a cost of about \$20.5 million. End Summary.

12. (U) The tragic accident in Gerdec on March 15 (Ref A) was yet another wake-up call to the GOA -- and its partners -- that ridding the country of decaying, dangerous munitions must be a top priority. The GOA can be proud of its record so far in eliminating chemical agents (the first country to do so under the Chemical Weapons Convention, Ref B), over 800,000 anti-personnel land mines, and the most serious threat to the population, massive seamines and torpedoes (Ref C). In addition, the MOD's EOD specialists have eliminated some 72,000 tons of munitions of various kinds on their own with some foreign funding.

13. (U) However, by many estimates, about 100,000 tons remain in poorly guarded and maintained depots throughout the country, literally a ticking time bomb. Stored munitions range from 7.62 mm small arms rounds to massive 160 mm (over six inches in diameter) artillery shells. Explosive material in these munitions usually contains a stabilizer which extends the storage life of the munitions preventing auto-ignition. However, the stabilizer is slowly consumed until, after some number of years, it no longer functions. Chemical analyses of Albanian munitions have shown that many of them are over 40 years old and are approaching that point, making the munitions extremely sensitive to shock and heat.

14. (C) According to a recent survey done by DOD's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), the MOD currently stores munitions in 44 sites throughout the country. (Note: It is

likely there are munitions stored in additional, unofficial sites.) Most of the sites contain small quantities of munitions, up to a few tons, collocated at military bases. Seven sites contain the bulk of the stores: Qafe Molle, Noje, Qafe Schtame, Mengel, Mirake, Mbbreshtan, and Grize. Besides conventional munitions, the MOD is storing 273 shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles (MANPADS - Chinese HN-5) and 30 tons of highly toxic SA-2 rocket fuel oxidizer. As with officially registered sites, this may not be a complete listing of Albanian munitions. The MOD has likely not been able to track all of the weapons inherited after the fall of the Hoxha regime. Most of the conventional munitions are of Chinese origin manufactured between 1961 and 1974. (Note: Gerdec was NOT listed as an MOD munitions storage facility because it was used by MOD's Military Export Import Company - MEICO - to store munitions it had contracted for sale. The investigation into responsibility for the Gerdec accident is ongoing. Please see Ref D.) Albania has no further known chemical agents/weapons or nuclear weapons.

15. (C) DTRA has proposed to the MOD that all usable ammunition be stored in Qafe Molle, Noje, and Mbreshtan when those facilities are upgraded to meet NATO standards. The unusable munitions need to be destroyed as soon as possible using two methodologies. DTRA has ruled out the 1.8 million euro rotary kiln installed and operated by NAMSA in Mjekes as being too costly to operate. DTRA recommends open-pit demolition for small-caliber ammunition and "reverse engineering" (dismantling the weapon and extracting the explosive, usually with steam) for larger munitions. Using Albania's three ammunition factories (Polican, Gramsh, and Mjekes) for dismantling and two EOD teams for open pit demolition, DTRA believes Albania's entire stockpile could be destroyed by mid-2012 at a cost of about \$20.5 million.

(Note: Finding a site for open pit demolition is not necessarily an easy task.)

16. (C) The Commander of the Support Command, Brigadier General Zija Bahja, has been active in trying to get the international community to increase demil funding to accelerate Albania's munitions destruction process. At their current rate, according to Bahja, it will take over 20 years to destroy the entire stockpile, a serious concern since some of it may well start self-destructing (i.e., spontaneous combustion) long before that. PM Berisha has made it clear that the surplus munitions need to be destroyed as soon as possible. The Ambassador and other high-level State and DOD interlocutors have applied continuing pressure to get the MOD (working through former Minister Mediu) to formally appeal for USG help to destroy the HN-5s. (Note: Mediu resigned March 17 - please see Ref E. A successor has not yet been named.)

16. (C) COMMENT: Whether the accident at Gerdec was caused by human error, spontaneous ignition of unstable munitions, or some other trigger has yet to be determined. What is

certain, though, is that munitions should never be stored near populated areas. Throughout its territory, including near large populated areas, Albania faces a ticking time bomb of decaying munitions inherited from the former communist regime. The GOA has a proposal from the USG to build NATO-standard ammo storage facilities for usable munitions in remote, safe areas, and to destroy the unusable ammunition as quickly as possible. A commitment of \$5 million per year for the next four years by NATO Allies would do the job and free this determined country from its final deadly legacy of the Cold War.

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